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# The Captain's Last Child

## A Story of German Life

Margaret Curme Wirtz

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# The Captain's Last Child

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FROM THE GERMAN OF

Ernst Von Wildenbruch

BY

Margaret Curme Wirtz

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# INTRODUCTION

Nations differ from each other in customs and manners, but the elemental passions are the same in all human beings. This little story of German life has a universal interest and should sink deep into every heart. The one great lesson in it—"Give the child love"—prompted the desire to place it before American readers and it is hoped the lesson will be of especial value to all those in whose care little ones have been intrusted.

This tragic little tale, with its impressive and pathetic descriptions and its successful portrayal of child life, is one of the most popular stories in modern German literature and is sure to hold the attention of younger as well as older readers.

The permission to make this translation was given by the author himself shortly before his death and I commend to all, this masterpiece of Ernst Von Wildenbruch—"Der Letzte."

MARGARET CURME WIRTZ.

# THE CAPTAIN'S LAST CHILD

How often when out walking I met old Mr. Bauer, the rector of the preparatory school at ———— and how glad I was whenever I saw him coming in the distance!

I was passionately fond of walking and almost always chose exactly the same path; by doing so we learn to know every stone and every leaf along the way, we feel doubly the reviving joy of spring when we see the swelling buds upon the very bush which we had seen in winter raising its leafless branches toward the sky; we observe how from day to day the buds have unfolded, how little leaves appear, how they grow larger and become darker: and thus, looking every day into the silent workshop of creative nature, we read as on a large dial the restless change of time. Whether it was these feelings which induced the rector to take regularly, almost daily, the way which I had chosen for my walk, I do not know; at any rate the path must have pleased him and it was indeed very beautiful.

Along the right bank of the large stream which rolls its grey waters through the eastern part of the North-German lowlands toward the Baltic Sea, a high dike had been constructed in order to protect the bottom-lands on this bank from the overflowing of the river during the spring floods. The dike stretched farther than the eye could reach since the right shore is quite flat there for miles, while the left consists of high bluffs at the foot of which was situated the city in which we both lived, the rector and I. At certain places the dike approached quite close to the stream, following its windings, like a guard who has been put in charge of a dangerous customer and who is unwilling to trust him out of his sight: at other places there remained larger or smaller spaces which were abandoned to the annually recurring overflow. These were wild, desolate strips on which nothing flourished because the sand-deposits of the stream made vegetation impossible and where only thickets of willow and alder grew. The fact is "the stream was treacherous," as they were accustomed to say in that region. Although it was often so shallow in summer that the boatmen could push their boats along only with great difficulty, it would suddenly come rushing along wildly and madly in the spring and sometimes even later when it had been raining in the mountains. Then its surly waters became brown and yellow, bubbles arose and twirled together, and the arms of the greedy stream reached out over the low shore as far as

possible, like those of a beggar who has suddenly become rich and now would like to have everything at once. At such times it was especially beautiful on the dike; one could see the angry waters rise higher and higher on the earth-walls, and when the north wind came racing along over the flat land and threw the refractory waves of the river back against the dike, when the roaring of the storm and the rushing of the waters united into one, dismal, monotonous, powerful sound of nature filling all the space between heaven and earth, then one felt something of the primitive condition of the elements, something of the thrilling sensation of danger.

It was on such a day as this that we met again and spoke for the first time, after we had passed each other innumerable times silently and with a secret smile. I was on the way out; he was returning to the city. As I was passing him he stopped. "If you intend to go further," he said with a strained voice, for the whistling wind tore the sound of the words from his lips, "I would like to warn you; the dike has just sprung a leak near the willow cliff and the deuce of a river is doing its best to make the opening larger. I am on my way to give the alarm in the city."

Before he had finished speaking I had already faced about and started to return with him; the wind was at our backs and drove us ahead like two ships with sails outspread. On the way he told me the particulars: the stream was still carrying occasional cakes of ice; one

of these, which had been ground as sharp as a piece of glass during its journey, had driven against the projecting slope of the dike and had cut deeply into it; the water had rushed into the hole and suddenly a considerable part of the slope had fallen in.

"Did you see it yourself?" I asked.

"No," he answered, "but I know that from experience; for thirty years I have been watching the river."

"And you do not seem to have learned to love it during that time?" I said as I remembered his description of a moment before.

"It is an ugly, treacherous stream," he replied, "and has caused much loss and sorrow."

In the meantime we had reached the city and had gone to the city-hall, where a special guard was organized at such times; workmen were at once sent out and the conjectures of the old rector were entirely confirmed; it was high time that help came in order to prevent a break in the dike. The opening was stopped up with fascines.

So we were acquainted and I had become the richer by a friend. The way and manner of the old man, his quiet firmness, his calm way of speaking attracted me to his personality, and this affection grew warmer day by day as I met him often now and joined him on his walks. His simplicity had nothing in common with prosiness; his dark, blue eyes had the keen glance of those who associate much and attentively with nature,

and his thin features had the unobtrusive smile of one who had experienced much and whose heart possesses a good memory.

He conducted, as has been said, the preparatory school of the Gymnasium;* to his care were entrusted the boys who were to be initiated into the first elements of knowledge—reading, writing, and the first four rules of arithmetic—in order that they might then enter the lowest classes of the gymnasium; those little fellows whom one sees walking thru the streets in the morning with their book-satchels of velvet and badger-skin. It is easy, therefore, to understand what importance old Mr. Bauer had for the parents of these little protégés of his; and many times they spoke of him in the family circle—always with respect and reverence. But it was positively surprising with what devoted love the children themselves clung to the old man. I had an opportunity to convince myself of that: the dike ran to the edge of the suburb and as soon as the children, who played and romped in the streets and before the front doors during the afternoon hours, saw the rector coming in the distance, the whole crowd would rush forward to meet him. Games were interrupted, quarrels were postponed for a while, and the children came galloping up from all directions as fast as their little legs could carry them.

* The German Gymnasium corresponds to the American High School.

His popularity extended far beyond the limits of the preparatory school and across the dividing line of sex; all the little folk, trousered and trouserless, booted and barefoot, boys and girls, gathered quickly in order to bring "the teacher" their tribute of love. So it happened that we were surrounded every time by a swarming crowd of little humanity, and I shall never forget how the little hands were stretched forth in order to be laid in his, how the bright childish eyes, in sweet modesty and yet beaming with joy, were raised to him with that gentle, confiding expression which the face of a child assumes when it feels that the grown-up person understands it.

In the midst of this assault of tenderness he now stood, his body bending slightly forward, like an old church tower surrounded by twittering swallows, the corners of his mouth drawn down in a roguish smile, his eyes full of infinite kindness: here and there he took hold of a curly head with his outspread fingers: now and then he would put his hand under a chin and raise up a little face: little was spoken: but when he addressed one or another of the children he knew and called them all by name. He showed special friendliness to those little creatures who were too timid to force their way to him through the crowd and who stood outside the circle looking up at him from the distance. He coaxed them nearer and tenderly stroked their glowing cheeks; and he showed equal attentive-

ness whenever he saw a child crying. He would bend down low so that the little one might whisper the cause of the trouble into his ear like a secret confession, and he did not rest until the tears had ceased to flow and bright joy had returned again. He exercised this office as comforter with peculiar importance,—his face meanwhile assuming an almost anxious expression.

One day I could not help expressing to him in a jesting way my astonishment at the fact that he treated with such seriousness a thing to which most people pay so little attention. He listened to me quietly, but remained very earnest and nodded at first silently to himself as he was accustomed to do when a thought or a memory occupied his mind.

"I know very well," he said after some time, "how the majority of grown-up people pass by the tears of children,—smiling, or vexed and full of impatience. They do not believe in the sorrows of young souls because they do not know children. The little ones are like the flowers; they cannot rise up to us, so we must bend down to them if we wish to know them. He who takes the trouble may often find in a beautiful flower not only the dew of heaven, but also a black, terrible worm which lacerates the tender calyx with rapacious jaws. O, there are sorrows in the soul of a child, and whoever has seen them will never forget them again!"

It was a warm, sunny day in spring when we had this conversation: the high water had gradually subsided

and only pools and ponds were left in the willow thickets at the foot of the dike. The farmers had come out to their fields and were beginning to work them again. As we were strolling leisurely along the usual path I saw before us close by the edge of the dike toward the stream a little lad about six years old lying down with his face to the ground. He was a blond-haired, delicate little fellow, clad only with a shirt and a pair of little trousers, plainly the child of poor people. While the mother was busy with the planting of potatoes in the field below, the boy had probably run up the dike and, attracted by the charm of the sun-warmed earth, he had lain down and fallen asleep.

The noise of our steps and the loud voice of old Mr. Bauer may have awakened and at the same time startled him: for now when we had come quite close to him I saw how a sudden, nervous twitching seized the thin little body. With a hasty movement he raised his head from his arms lying beneath it, and in the next moment he had lost his footing and was rolling down the slope of the dike. Just at the place where this happened there was one of the above-named thickets in which the water was still standing, although it was of no considerable depth.

The old rector uttered a half-suppressed cry of terror and sprang with two or three bounds down the slope and after the child. In the moment when the latter had almost touched the water, the rector grasped him and

raised him from the ground with a convulsive grip. As soon as the boy, who had been stunned by this sudden incident, realized the situation he began to cry pitifully. The old man lifted him upon his left arm and carried him; as he slowly climbed up the slope he took his handkerchief and wiped the dirt from the child's face and hair. The boy, who seemed to be frail by nature and who now for the first time realized that something unusual had happened to him, naturally began to cry louder than ever, and then the old man ran up and down the dike with him, petting him, encouraging him, and trying in every way to amuse him. Finally his purpose was accomplished and when he set him down the little fellow was laughing as merrily as a goblin.

All this was infinitely droll and at the same time very touching to see. In order to soothe the boy completely, the old man put his hand into his pocket and brought forth a five-penny piece. "Be sure that you never lie down on the ground so near the water again and go to sleep! Do you understand?" he said while he held up the piece of money before the child's eyes.

Whether this warning fell upon very attentive ears, I am inclined to doubt: for as soon as the boy felt the coin in his hand he turned around suddenly and shot like a bullet out of the barrel of a gun down the bank toward his mother, all the while waving the coin in his right hand high above his head. We followed him with

our eyes and involuntarily I was forced to laugh as I saw what a flood of joy was expressed in the hasty movements of those little legs. They were like two little exclamation points of delight.

"Do give better attention to your child," called Mr. Bauer in a loud voice to the woman who had continued to work at her potatoes without taking any notice of the events on the dike. "Your boy came within a hair's breadth of falling into the water,' 'continued he, as she now raised her head, her attention having been attracted by the joyful cry of the little fellow. What the boy told her we could not understand, however the impression was only vague, for she looked up to us once more with a passing glance and a slight nod, directed her boy to stay by her and again resumed her work.

"That's the way it is with these people," said the rector, as he took off his hat and wiped the perspiration from his brow. "When they lose their children they realize for the first time that they have possessed a jewel which shone with its own inherent light and filled their poverty with brightness."

"But do you really believe," said I, "that the child could have suffered harm? The water is so low that, in my opinion, a cold bath would have been the worst that could have happened to him."

"You are right," he answered as he looked down at the pool. "I see now that I became excited without cause. It must be due to the fact that it happened just

at this place." "How so, just at this place," I asked in surprise. He did not answer, and by the fixed gaze with which he looked down into the depths I perceived how some remembrance or other rose up from below and enveloped him with its dreamy net.

"What is there in this place?" I asked once more, "is it marked by some particular occurrence?" I must have guessed it, for he raised his head and looked into my eyes with a burning gaze.

"You have asked me to explain," he said in a solemn tone, "why I stoop down to the children, inquire into their sorrows and dry their tears, and I have answered you with a few general words, but the explanation was only partial; tomorrow you shall have it in full—tomorrow," he repeated dreamily. He pressed my hand and I saw him disappear with bowed and thoughtful head between the houses of the town.

When we met each other the next day the old rector told me the following tale:

"A number of years ago a captain was transferred from the western part of Germany to the regiment of artillery which is quartered here. 'The Black Captain, was the name by which he was known among the soldiers and the people, and his appearance certainly justified the name. Everything about him was gloomy and black. Dark hair and a long flowing beard of the same color framed his weather-beaten face and his eyes looked forth from beneath bushy eyebrows: in addition

to this there was the dark-blue artillery uniform, with black velvet on the collar and the cap, which surrounded his gigantic form.

"It was a winter afternoon when I saw him for the first time and I shall never forget how he passed by me through the white glimmering snow like a huge black shadow. I must have assumed a very puzzled expression, for he cast a hasty glance toward me and I thereby had an opportunity to observe his features. If I have ever seen a gloomy human countenance, this was one. It was not hard, not forbidding, not even stern, but overwhelmingly serious: the face of a man who is convinced that fate is against him but who has taken up the inexorable conflict resolved to fight the battle to the bitter end. He had eyes which looked as though they had never laughed, and a mouth which did not seem to have been made for speech. According to all that I could hear, his inner nature corresponded to his outward appearance. He was taciturn and unsociable, living alone in the rooms which he had rented here in the suburbs near the stables of his battery. The quarters were much more roomy than a single person needs and the curiosity of the neighbors hovered around the 'black captain' as industriously as a swarm of bees around a flower, and soon discovered that he had a wife and children and would send for his family as soon as he had become settled in the place.

"This first report was soon corrected by a second: his wife was no longer living. When she had died could not be learned, but it was certain that she was dead. Gottlieb Bänsch, the captain's servant, who was helping him get settled in the house, had seen his master hang up in his room directly above his desk a photograph in a black ebony frame with a black cross above the center of it. It was the picture of a woman.

"'She must have been beautiful, though!' said Gottlieb Bänsch to the eagerly listening porter's wife, through whom the news concerning the captain was spread further. Gottlieb said that the captain had taken the picture from a case of 'pure black velvet' and every time when he returned from duty he would look at the picture, and evenings when he had the lamp placed on the table he would turn it so that the light fell directly upon it. And one evening when Gottlieb was preparing supper for his master as usual the captain, who was again sitting before his writing-desk, turned to him and asked if he knew how to manage children, and when he didn't know just what to reply the captain asked whether he liked children. And when he answered 'Yes, I get along very well with them,' the captain nodded and while looking at the picture continued, saying the children had lost their mother and it would be very expensive to engage a nurse and it wouldn't suit him anyway, and he would therefore prefer to try entrusting them to him for the present. Then he said the captain

arose and walked up and down the room until the tea had become quite cold, and when he presently asked the captain whether he had not ordered tea he stood still, and it seemed that he had not noticed before that the servant was still there and he said, 'Oh yes—but you had better go to bed now,' and gave him a cigar. Gottlieb Bänsch was satisfied with his master and thought that he had an easy time under him.

"After having heard this report the porter's wife also accepted the opinion that he must be a good man, and the fact that he had lost his beautiful young wife and suffered such grief because of it, aroused her sympathy. Her energetic tongue saw to it that the news which she had heard was set in circulation among the neighbors and the curiosity and astonishment which had followed the lonely man hitherto gave way to that sympathetic timidity which is felt in the presence of misfortune. The arrival of his children was awaited with intense interest.

"The black captain had expressed to Gottlieb Bänsch his intention of going after the children himself, but had said that he would wait until spring, for the winter here was very cold and the children were not used to such a climate in their own home. This report increased the interest; in their own minds the people pictured these little ones who had been born in a land where it was so much warmer and must therefore be so much more

beautiful, and they praised the earnest man who showed such thoughtful care for the tender creatures.

Spring came and one day the captain went away on the train. Several days later, on the appointed evening, Gottlieb Bänsch went to the station at a late hour in order to meet his master. Shortly afterward, when it had grown quite dark, a closed carriage rolled up to the lonesome house. Gottlieb Bänsch jumped down from the driver's seat and opened the door of the carriage. From its interior he took a small bundle, which, upon closer inspection, would have proved to be a sleeping child. Then two little legs and after these two still smaller ones came climbing down the step, and then came the long form of the captain himself, who, like Gottlieb Bänsch, carried a small bundle in his arms. The front door of the house was opened and then closed again—the black captain had moved in with his four children.

"And behold—on the next day, when it was bright, warm and sunny noon, a miracle happened—a beautiful, lovely miracle: the door of the captain's house was opened and out came four little boys, each one just a little smaller than the preceding, like organ pipes, four delightful, charming little creatures. On the threshold of the door they had to meet the first obstacle, for there stood the porter's wife, who clapped her hands for sheer delight at sight of the four little lads, and would not

let them pass until she had kissed each one of them half to death.

"Then came Gottlieb Bänsch, who was performing his duties as nurse for the first time and whose good, honest face was quite flushed with zeal and pleasure. 'The very image of their mother—not a trace of their father, not even a trace,' he said over the heads of the children to the porter's wife, who was still kneeling on the floor and could hardly contain herself for admiration. He arranged his little column by carrying the youngest of the children on his left arm and leading the second youngest with his right hand, while the two older boys, six and seven years of age, went on ahead hand in hand. With little mincing steps they came across the street and went up the dike, Gottlieb Bänsch directing their way by calling out, 'Now to the left—now straight ahead,' and thus I met them on that first day."

The rector was silent and wiped his face. Was it perspiration that he wiped away? I think not.

"How many years," he continued after a long pause, "have passed since then, and how often the sun has described its arc across the dike from morning to evening, and yet, long ago as it is, I still have a feeling as if there were a void, a dark spot which can never be made bright, at the place where I saw the children that day and do not see them any more. The spot, I know right well, is in my own soul, for I cannot forget the light that rose in me when I saw them coming slowly

along, those four little boys with their long blond locks waving in the light breeze and with the large, sparkling blue eyes which were turned with astonishment upon the new world round about them and upon the strange people that hurried past them. These forms of light the children of the gloomy black captain? I could hardly believe it, for it was as if one should suddenly see new and fragrant buds breaking forth on an old withered stump which had been thought to be quite dead. I stood still before them and the two boys in the lead looked timidly and anxiously at the stranger who barred their path.

"'What is your name?' I asked the oldest one, and looking at me with big eyes he replied after some hesitation, 'Edmund': he spoke in the somewhat broad dialect of his home, so that his little lips gave his name the sound of 'Ademund,' and this was infinitely charming and pretty. I turned with the same question to the second boy, but he clung anxiously to his older brother without answering. Little Edmund looked first at his embarrassed brother and then at me, and with the most charming laugh he said: 'Herman is his name,' which he pronounced again as 'Hārman.' Now he looked at me quite happily with wide-open eyes and seemed to have forgotten all of his timidity. 'Then give me your hands,' I said, and the two little right hands were joined in mine.

"'We will be good friends now, will we not?' I said as I stooped down low to the boys. Edmund nodded energetically with his curly blond head, while little Herman smiled at me gently.

"I turned to the two younger ones, who were perhaps three and four years old. 'That is George,' explained Edmund, who had stepped with me to his little brother, and he pointed to the child whom the servant was leading by the hand. The left hand of the little boy rested in the large, heavy hand of the soldier, and Gottlieb Bänsch held it very carefully, as if he were afraid of crushing the tender little fingers. 'And that is Maurice,' said Edmund's clear voice when we at last stood before the little boy, who was sitting on Gottlieb's left arm. I was about to take hold of his hand, but the child became afraid and threw both his arms around the servant's neck, so that his face was pressed tight against the latter's head.

Gottlieb Bänsch laughed all over his broad, good-natured face. 'Just give the gentleman your hand,' he said, 'just give him your little hand,' but his admonition did not seem to be of much avail.

"'He is still so small—he is still afraid,' explained Edmund in order to excuse the helplessness of his little brother. He seemed to be fully conscious of his dignity and duty as 'the oldest' and I had to laugh heartily. Then I turned to him again: 'So you are big Edmund, are you?' The boy looked at me with his beautiful,

intelligent eyes so merrily that I could not refrain from grasping him under the arms and tossing him up into the air and pressing a hearty kiss on his glowing face. As soon as I had set him down on the ground again and he had adjusted his little jacket he darted forward a few steps to the edge of the dike and I saw him stoop down and pull something out of the ground. He came back immediately and offered me—a new-blown violet.

"'Is that for me?' I asked, and the lovely child nodded silently, blushing and smiling as I took the flower from his earth-stained fingers.

"Now little Herman had also taken courage and approached me.

"'Please throw me up, too,' he cried, so I had to toss him up also. Now, when George and little Maurice saw their brother fluttering in the air so merrily they began to scream with delight and there was a tumult of pure joy and happiness.

"'Well, now say good-bye and thank the gentleman nicely,' admonished Gottlieb Bänsch, who was making decided progress as nurse and tutor.

"Edmund and Herman, or, speaking more correctly, Mundi and Männchen—for a child that is not called by a loving nickname is like a flower that is designated only by a Latin botanical term—Mundi and Männchen then took off their little felt caps and simultaneously made a bow in my direction, which was meant very seriously and which looked infinitely droll. Then they

took each other by the hand, and while the little caravan started on its way I stood still and followed them with my eyes. A moment later when they had gone a few steps farther Mundi turned around, Männchen imitated him and I could observe by the large eyes with which they looked back at me that they were now lost in wonderment over the stranger who had so quickly formed a friendship with them. They turned around again and continued their way, and just as I saw them at that time, tripping with little steps along the dike, now asking Gottlieb Bänsch a question, now running forward a few steps, then stopping again to watch the very remarkable conduct of some butterfly, even so have they remained in my memory; and thus I see them ever and again, walking along before me farther and farther away until they grow smaller and smaller, like minute shining little spots on a long, long road which leads into the beyond.

"A week had not passed before the whole town knew what nice little fellow-citizens it had won; another week more, and the four-leaved clover was the favorite of the whole town. The women who met them caressed and kissed them, the men showed them little favors by helping them look for a lost ball or by assisting them to fly their kites. And all of this took place under the eyes of Gottlieb Bänsch, who grew ever more proficient in his position as nurse-maid and developed in this capacity

the most varied qualities, but the best of these was—a good heart.

"He proved himself extremely ingenious in the invention and manufacture of every conceivable plaything. He whittled the children whistles out of wood and sword-grass, made them cross-bows, helmets of gold paper with tassels, and he even made a sword belt for Mundi out of an old leather strap, and a wooden sword for the belt. One could not imagine anything more comical than when he was working away on these things with earnest mien down in the meadow where the children were playing. The four little fellows would stand around him with astonished gaze, awaiting the moment when the new wonder should be completed and placed in their hands.

"The black captain was never seen on these walks with his children and ever busy rumor quickly came to the conclusion that he did not care for them.

"Even at that time I could not believe the truth of this assertion, for children who are not loved by their father do not look as happy as these did, nor so well cared for, are not well-bred and courteous toward people as these children were, nor do they wear such fine and neatly made little jackets and such perfectly fitting shoes and boots. Gottlieb Bänsch took exactly this view of the case also and gave it as his opinion that the captain loved his children very much, but was unable to express it. I was soon to have an opportunity for a

deeper insight into the relations between father and children; for when the vacation had come at the close of which the new school semester began, my door-bell rang one day and when I opened the door the black captain was standing there, Mundi at his right hand and Männchen at his left. He greeted me with reserved but friendly courtesy and while we sat down by the table he informed me in a deep bass voice that he wished to have his two boys received into the preparatory school.

"'They lost their mother so soon,' he said, 'and I have not sufficient time to care for them as I should like to do.'

"Meanwhile the two boys had been looking about the room, and while little Herman was leaning dreamily against the window and looking out, Edmund studied with great interest the titles of the books upon my shelves.

"'Do you understand what this is?' I asked as I stepped forward and took down a book. 'Just read this for me,' I said as I held the title of the book toward him.

"'Daniel's Manual of Geography,' he read without hesitation.

"'Do you know what geography is?' I inquired further.

"'Geography is the description of the earth,' the little lad rattled off like clockwork.

"'Just see,' I said laughing, 'you are already quite a learned little man,' and I glanced at the captain, whose

eyes were resting upon the boy. I grasped the situation instantly, for in the silent glow of these eyes I saw with what passionate power the soul of the man clung to the boy. The little examination which I had arranged had plainly excited the father far more than the boy himself; this I observed by the almost imperceptible trembling of his nostrils and by the suggestion of a proud smile which played about his face as he now drew the boy close to him and laid his hand upon his blond head.

"'What do you wish to become some day?' I asked the child.

"'A professor,' he answered, and the words came like a shot out of a pistol.

"'He has gotten that idea into his head somehow,' said the captain, and this time he really smiled, and it was a happy smile. What a structure of proud hopes must have arisen before his soul while he gazed down on his bright, intelligent child!

"'Now you come here, too,' he said, turning to Männchen, who was still standing by the window. The child came forward and with his gentle eyes looked up innocently into his father's face. I have never seen a tenderer look in the eyes of a child.

"'And what do you wish to make of yourself?' asked the captain, and the tone of his voice sounded somewhat harsher.

"Männchen glanced toward his brother.

"'A professor, too,' he answered with his thin little voice.

"Mundi laughed outright and the captain brushed the little fellow's hair with his hand. 'You would make a fine professor,' he said.

"I do not know why it was, but I felt driven to intercede for the child; for in the manner in which the captain spoke to him and treated him there was a depreciatory tone that annoyed and offended me and hurt the feelings of the harmless little creature, who looked up at his father with such a gentle, trusting look as if nothing but justice, love and kindness could come from there.

"'Certainly,' I said appeasingly, 'if Männchen is diligent he will learn everything that Mundi has learned, and then he can become a professor, too, some day.'

"'Mundi can write already,' said the little fellow as he looked in great admiration toward his elder brother, who blushed with pride and pleasure and looked as bright as an unfolding bud upon a rose bush.

"The captain's eyes turned toward the oldest boy again and rested upon him, and I saw plainly that the younger lad had no chance of competing with his older brother in the father's affections.

"Both boys now entered the preparatory school: Mundi was placed in the upper class and sped forward like a young and spirited colt; Männchen entered the class below and was just as industrious but plainly not

so gifted as his brother, who was in reality a child of unusual ability. Every morning they came to school punctually at the stroke of the bell and at the close of the session Mundi could be seen at the outer door waiting for Männchen, or Männchen waiting for Mundi, and they trotted home hand in hand, a beautiful picture of brotherly love and harmony.

"This continued for some time, then winter came; in place of the light little summer jackets the children wore heavy, warm overcoats; the little legs trotted on their way to school in top boots and the blond little heads were covered with fur caps, from beneath which the small faces looked forth, red and fresh as Borsdorf apples. After a cold winter a warm spring followed, and then came a very hot, dry summer. At this season it happened for the first time that Mundi became inattentive and indifferent during class hours. I looked at the boy and noticed in his eyes an expression which I had not seen there before; they were tired and looked as if they were covered with a film.

"'Is anything the matter with you?' I asked as I placed my hand under his chin and looked into his face. His skin was hot and dry. 'Does anything hurt you?' He nodded slightly. 'Where does it hurt?' I asked. 'In my head,' he answered. 'Go down to the well,' I said, 'drink a glass of fresh water and then come back.'

"The child arose and went out, but did not return. I stepped to the window and saw him sitting on a bench

in the yard, his head leaning back against the wall of the house. A sudden anxiety seized me. I called Männchen from his class room.

"'Your little brother is ill,' I said to him; 'run home and tell Gottlieb Bänsch to come for him.'

"When Männchen saw his brother sitting so pitifully on the bench he rushed toward him and embraced him, but Mundi did not return the caress and the little fellow remained standing for a moment quite confused as his arms hung limply at his side.

"'Run quickly,' I said, 'run'; and he shot away with the speed of the wind.

"Fifteen minutes later, not Gottlieb Bänsch, but the captain himself appeared, and I shall never forget the look of anxious fear with which he hurried to the boy. He took him into his arms and pressed him to his breast; then he carried him to the cab he had brought with him, which was waiting at the gate. The boy seemed unconscious of what was being done with him. Männchen had also stepped to the door and remained standing there very sad while the cab rolled away; the father had had thoughts and looks for Mundi only.

"And today Männchen went home from school alone for the first time.

"The next day Mundi did not return to school and when I inquired after him of his little brother, who sat silent and troubled in his seat, I learned that he was very ill; and when I met Gottlieb Bänsch in the after-

noon with the other children, he informed me, his face full of anxiety and care, that the doctor thought it might become very serious and that the captain had sat by his bed the whole night and would not leave the child at all. The doctor had divined correctly and Gottlieb Bänsch had heard correctly; it did become serious."

Again the old rector made a long pause; then there appeared upon his features a bitter, angry smile. "The men of old," he said, "had it easier than we; when a brutal stroke of fate robbed them of a precious treasure they simply said, 'The gods have become jealous.' We Christians are expected to interpret everything which happens to us as sent from God for our good, even though many times we do not understand Him at all; no, not at all, not in the least."

He had torn his hat from his head and was waving it to and fro, and the pain which the remembrance caused him seemed to be as hot and powerful as on that day when all this happened which he was telling me now years afterward. "For how can one understand it," he continued, "and why should it be that suddenly destruction was allowed to fall upon all this beautiful childhood which existed only for the joy and delight of men, destruction in its most horrible form, in the form of that monster with glassy eyes and fevered cheeks——"

He stopped in the midst of his sentence when he observed my astonished look. "I see," he said, "that I am

beginning to rave instead of telling my story; what I mean was—scarlet fever.

"Where had it so suddenly come from? In the whole city there was not another case of it. Could it be that the children had not been able to stand the sudden changes of temperature? All these questions remained unanswered before the fearful and certain fact: it was there. Like a thief in the night it had broken into the unfortunate captain's house and had thrown itself with fiendish power upon little Edmund. For twenty-four hours the poor child languished in the delirium of fever: then little Maurice and George were also stricken. Männchen, pale as a shadow, continued at school three days, but on the fourth he also remained at home. He, too, was smitten with the fever.

"Then there came a day when the people stopped each other on the street and whispered something to each other softly and secretly as if there hovered in the air above them a fearful tyrannical power which one dared not waken through loud talking. The women clasped their hands together and the men shook their heads; then they looked across at the darkened windows of the captain's house with that timid glance with which one looks upon an inexplicable misfortune, upon a man stricken by the hand of God.

"'All four dead?' I heard a woman ask as I walked along the dike.

"'Three,' was the answer, 'and the fourth child lies dying.'

"When I heard this I had to lean against a tree, for I felt my blood stand still in my veins; and while I stood there with trembling knees I experienced a frightful delusion: I saw the leaves of the trees, the grass upon the meadow, everything green as far as my eye could reach, turn into a dry, rusty yellow; not the golden yellow of autumn, but the dead yellow of the desert."

The rector turned to me and said: "Do not think that I am indulging my imagination; I had as full possession of my senses as I have at this moment and that is just why it seemed so terrible. I had a dull, vague longing to learn more of the details and with this in view I went over to the stricken home. When the door opened I saw the porter's wife in her basement lodgings looking forth with eyes that were red and swollen, and when she recognized me she sat down upon the steps of the stairway, covered her face with her apron and once more began to weep violently and mournfully. 'Do not go up,' she said, 'it is too terrible. God loved his little angels too well and wished to have them with him again.' I listened to her without uttering a sound: little Herman alone had not yet been taken from them, but the doctor entertained the gravest fears for his life also.

"I turned away, overwhelmed with sadness, and left the house. 'God loved his angels too well'—these words rang in my soul like an echo of the deadly occurrence.

"Let me pass over the day when we carried them to the grave while a great throng of voluntary mourners joined the sad procession. Flowers without number covered the little mound where they lay in one common grave, and a large lilac bush spread its branches over it.

"I saw the captain on this day for the first time since the beginning of these events. Not a line in his face quivered, not a tear fell from his eyes, but the expression of his features was such that no one ventured to speak a word to him. In spite of this fact I pressed forward and grasped his hand; for a moment he stared at me, then his eyes began to roll so that nothing but the whites were visible, and with a sudden, almost wild movement, he tore his hand from mine and turned away.

"It was different with Gottlieb Bänsch. I had not noticed him at first because he kept himself quite in the background; as I now discovered him, I saw that he had turned away from the grave and the assembled crowd and stood with his helmet in his hand, weeping silently so that the tears ran down his cheeks.

"At first the people were so stunned by the awful effect of the sudden death of the children that no one realized that one of the boys was still alive. I confess that I also completely forgot the child and when I

inquired about him I did so with the tacit assumption that his death had already occurred or at least was constantly expected. The opposite was the case, for little Herman had overcome the disease and was recovering.

"It was several weeks later when I met him again for the first time, as Gottlieb Bänsch was leading him by the hand. With drooping head and wavering steps he came along, as if walking was still quite difficult for him; my eyes filled with tears. 'How do you do, Männchen,' I said as I stood before him and offered him my hand.

"The child raised his eyes to me: they had grown still larger than before and looked forth from a pale, emaciated little face. It was a pitiful sight. 'Don't you know me any more?' I asked as he made no move to take my hand, and as I noticed that his eyes were fixed upon me as though he saw me for the first time.

"The boy clung silently to the soldier, timid and anxious, as if he wished to hide himself behind the servant's coat.

"Gottlieb Bänsch laid his large hand upon the child's head and patted it gently. 'Don't be afraid,' he said soothingly, 'this man is very fond of little boys.'

"His encouragement was of no avail and Gottlieb Bänsch looked down at the little fellow and shook his head.

"'Has he not entirely recovered?' I asked.

"'Yes, he is quite well again,' answered the servant, 'but'—— He did not finish the sentence and nodded slowly to himself. I saw how it grieved him and it seemed to me that he wished to say more but did not trust himself to do so.

"'Will you soon be in school again with us?' I asked, turning to Männchen once more.

"'That would indeed be the best,' answered Gottlieb Bänsch for the child, 'for you see,' and he spoke more softly, as if he did not wish the boy to understand him—'my time will soon be up and I must go home, and I do not know at all what will become of the child.'

"I looked at him in astonishment and rejoined: 'What will become of him? Isn't he with his father?'

"Gottlieb Bänsch nodded again thoughtfully as before. 'There, run now to the sand-pile,' he said to Männchen, as he gave him a little wheelbarrow and put a wooden spade into his hand which he had brought along for the child, 'play awhile in the sand and I will be there soon,' he added.

"The little fellow followed instructions and wheeled his barrow from the dike toward the sand-pile, where I had formerly seen him so many times in innocent play with his brothers.

"When he had gone, Gottlieb Bänsch turned to me again and said: 'I do not know what to think of the captain. All day long he goes about without speaking

a word to anyone and it seems as though he were not even conscious of the existence of little Männchen.'

"I thought of the incident which had occurred in my study. 'I believe,' I said, 'that he loved the oldest boy best.'

" 'Yes, indeed,' replied the servant, 'I think he would scarcely have missed all the others if the oldest had only been spared to him.' He looked down at Männchen, who was busy with his wheelbarrow. 'It is true, indeed,' he continued, 'the eldest was a capital little fellow; but this poor creature is certainly not to blame that he alone is left.'

. . . . .

"He walked away toward the boy and certainly had no suspicion of the awful impression his simple words had made upon me.

. . . . .

"It was the end of summer; autumn had come when the reservists were discharged. One of these was Gottlieb Bänsch, whose three-year period of service had expired. I need not describe to you the picture which the city presents at such a time; the soldier rejoices in the freedom which he has regained and endeavors to give suitable expression to his consciousness of it. Singly and in groups one sees them passing through the streets, —infantry-men, cavalry-men, artillery-men, in the old uniform which they are allowed to take home. The cap which they had hitherto worn straight, according to

regulations, is now perched on the ear; each man is without side-arms, but is equipped with a cane. The Prussian reservist upon returning to the pursuits of peace considers this emblem of civil life absolutely indispensable. He handles it with the proud feeling that he may now do and wear what has hitherto been forbidden. By the various forms of the canes one can recognize the characteristics of the different branches of the service. The cane of the cavalry-man is the most elegant and slender, that of the infantry-man is stronger and thicker, while the artillery-men wield veritable clubs. Gottlieb Bänsch appeared with a club of the latter kind on the day when he was discharged.

"It was a cloudy afternoon in September. I happened to be at the railroad station, where I had said farewell to a departing friend, when I saw him coming down the street. Companies of other reservists who were to be sent to the same place as Gottlieb Bänsch were walking before and behind him, loudly shouting and singing. He went along apart from them, very quiet and very earnest. In his right hand he carried his few belongings wrapped in a red cotton handkerchief. At his left ran Männchen.

"I wondered if the boy knew that he was accompanying Gottlieb Bänsch for the last time. The latter had given him his large, heavy cane, and the child was using it as a hobby-horse. He grasped the curved handle of the cane with his little hands and rode along beside

the soldier. When they reached the platform of the station Gottlieb Bänsch took the boy a little to one side and while the soldier thoughtfully regarded the waiting train, Männchen looked up at him in quiet astonishment, as if he noticed a change in him. I stood close behind them. He stooped down to the child and gently patted his cheeks while he cautiously took the cane out of his hands.

"'You see,' he said, while he pointed to the train, 'now I must get in and ride home, and here I have brought you something nice.' From his coat pocket he drew a little wooden flute, which he handed to the child; evidently he had bought it with his meagre savings.

"Männchen received the gift without taking his eyes from Gottlieb Bänsch. I stepped up to them. 'Won't you have a cigar?' I said, addressing the young man and offering him my cigar case.

"'I thank you very much,' he replied as he took a cigar from the case with his clumsy fingers.

"'Oh, take more,' I said, and I emptied the entire contents of the case into his hand.

"'Thank you, thank you,' he replied, while he smiled in confusion and shoved the cigars between the buttons of his coat. I gave him my hand at parting and he pressed it warmly as he touched his cap. How hard his hand was and how rough those fingers, but how tender his heart, how sensitive and good!

"'I hope you will be kind enough,' he remarked quietly to me, 'to take the child with you from the depot. He was so anxious to come with me and I did not have the heart to leave him at home.' I silently nodded my consent.

"The signal bell was ringing and as Gottlieb Bänsch started to get in, Männchen clung to him with both his hands. The young man freed himself gently from the child, but when he had climbed into the compartment the little fellow set his foot upon the step and stretched out his arms toward him. 'Let me go along, oh let me go along,' he cried, while he looked up anxiously at Gottlieb Bänsch.

"The other soldiers who sat in the compartment began to laugh. 'Just look at the little reservist,' they said; 'he wants to go along, too.'

"But Gottlieb Bänsch climbed down once more and laid his two large hands upon the child's face so that it was entirely covered; he stooped down close to him and gently patted him on the back and tried to laugh—but suddenly the big tears rolled down his cheeks. 'Why, it is impossible, little man,' he said; 'it is impossible.' Then he tore himself away and sprang with one bound back into the compartment, the door of which closed behind him. The train began to move and rolled out of the station amid the thundering Hurrah of the soldiers.

"Lost amid the crowd of people that thronged the depot-platform, the child remained standing as if dazed and stared after the train, which was rapidly disappearing in the distance. The wooden flute which Gottlieb Bänsch had given him he grasped tightly with his little hands. I kept close behind him and the sight of the lonely child wrung my heart with pity. 'Well, Männchen,' I said as I stepped up and took his little limp hand in mine, 'come, give me your hand, we will go home now.'

"The boy raised his pale little face toward me. 'Will he come back soon?' he asked. The young man had concealed it from him, or the child had not understood that the parting was to be for ever, nor did I have the courage to explain it to him fully.

" 'Come now,' I said, 'be a good child and everything will come out right.'

"My admonition was unnecessary, for there never was a more obedient creature than this poor child. He allowed his little cold hand to remain in mine and just as he had come to the station with Gottlieb Bänsch so he went away with me. As we walked along I considered what I should do with him. I had to take him back to his father, that was clear, but involuntarily an uncanny feeling took possession of me at the thought.

"We came to a confectioner's shop and I went in and purchased some candy for him. I felt the necessity of filling the gloomy little heart with comfort and light.

"I held the open sack before his eyes. 'Just see the pretty candies,' I said; 'shall we not eat some of them?'

"The boy looked silently into the sack but did not move a finger; I had to put a bon-bon into his mouth myself.

"Although the incident was so trivial it nevertheless made a deep impression upon me. Until now children's tears had seemed to me like thunder showers, which fall quickly and quickly disappear. Here I saw a child who did not cry and who was not affected by the comfort which so easily brings relief to the distress of little ones. I could not decide to take him back to his father at once, so I took him along to my home and ordered a cup of milk for him. While waiting I showed him the pictures and the books in my room and tried to cheer him up with various amusements. He looked on and listened silently. Then I set him on the sofa and like a bird he slowly sipped the contents of the cup which I had placed before him. Meanwhile it was growing dark and I was forced to think seriously of taking him home. 'Come, Männchen,' I said; 'get ready, we must now go home to papa.'

"He climbed down from the sofa obediently, reached for his little hat, then remained standing in the middle of the room.

"'Well?' I said as I stepped to the door in order to open it. I had scarcely touched the door-knob when the child, who, until now, had not cried nor uttered a

sound, began to sob pitifully. He did not raise his head nor move a limb, but stood there as if in deep despair and cried—cried."

The rector's voice choked, his breast labored heavily, he drew the palm of his hand twice, three times over his eyes.

"Since that hour," he continued, "I can never pass a child when I see it crying, for in that hour I learned how children can cry and that their tears can be terrible, more terrible than the tears of grown up people.

"I let go the door and reached him with one step. 'Männchen?' I said.

"And now the boy threw both his arms around me and clung to the folds of my coat, and while sobbing as if his heart would break he pressed his face against me as if endeavoring to hide himself. 'I am so afraid,' he cried; 'I am so afraid.'

"Like an icy chill these words pierced my heart, like a sudden fearful shock. I did not dare ask of what or of whom he was afraid; I did not dare to offer him consolation, for I felt that nature's cry of despair which had burst forth from this child's soul was infinitely superior to all my wisdom, and was very much sounder than all my reasoning.

"I sat down on a chair and lifted the child upon my lap; I took his little ice-cold hands in mine and pressed his tear-stained face against my breast; and thus I sat with him a long, long time in the growing twilight of

my room and the stillness round about us was broken only by the boy's sobbing and weeping, which gradually subsided and began to die away. I did not speak a word but pressed the frail little form close to me, and though its weight rested lightly upon my knees yet I felt as if I were holding all the infinite burden of human sorrow and suffering incarnate in this child upon my lap.

"In that hour I learned for the first time to know how great and sacred is the responsibility of leading and educating children. I thought I knew my work before, because I had learned enough to meet all formal requirements; but now in the presence of this child, whose soul cried for love and to whom the world had become desolate because it found no love, I learned that I had been groping in the dark and that the entire wisdom of my calling can be expressed in the one word: 'Give the child love.'

"Finally, when the first, most violent attack of despair had subsided and the boy had ceased crying, I raised him cautiously from my lap and set him upon his feet. I stroked his blond hair and placed his cap on his head; then, without a word further, I took him by the hand. He yielded to me obediently as ever and without further resistance he walked by my side through the darkening streets of the city toward his father's house.

"As we entered the room the captain was sitting by his desk, his head resting upon his hand: the lamp stood beside him and caused his haggard profile to contrast

sharply with its black outline of beard and hair. A book lay open before him, but his eyes passed over it and rested upon a picture which hung on the wall above his desk; I recognized it from the description I had heard; it was the picture of his wife. His thoughts seemed to be deep and earnest and his gaze was so fixed that, as he turned his head toward the open door, it looked as if he had to break a band which came from the picture and bound his eyes to it.

When he recognized me he arose and greeted me. I noticed the astonished look with which he observed the boy at my side. 'Where do you come from so late?' he asked as he glanced down at the little fellow.

"The boy did not utter a sound. I explained to him where he had gone and that I had met him at the station and had taken him home with me.

"The captain nodded his head silently.

" 'I thank you,' he then said; 'pray be seated.' While I sat down he returned to his chair before the writing desk.

" 'Come here,' he said as he turned to Männchen, who had remained standing upon the very spot where he had stood beside me. The child cast a timid glance at his father, took a half step toward him and then stood still again.

" 'Come, now, I am not going to hurt you,' said the captain impatiently. He stretched out his arms and

drew the boy to him so that the latter stood between his knees.

"'Are you hungry? Do you want any supper?' asked the captain as he stroked the child's hair. Männchen shook his head silently; then the expression of his face changed and he looked as if he were going to cry.

"'Don't be crying all the time,' said the father. The child was frightened, forced back his tears and without looking at his father he stood there, rigid and motionless; his little face was as pale as death. Suddenly the captain stooped down and with an almost wild movement he lifted the boy upon his lap and pressed him to his breast. He held him with both his arms in a close embrace, his head sank down so low that his black beard lay like a dark cloud over the child's face and he pressed the boy so violently that he lay as if dead upon his breast.

"All this occurred in deep, unbroken silence; the boy's head had fallen back, he had closed his eyes and for a moment it looked as if he were really dead. The captain did not speak a word, only a stifled groan escaped him, and while he handled the boy as if he were a doll it looked as if he were overcome by a violent attack of despair. At last his head sank so low that it rested upon the boy's breast and he continued in this dull apathy for some time.

"This whole proceeding was alike heartrending and thrilling. I recalled the words which Gottlieb Bänsch

had said: 'He loves his children but he can't express it,' and indeed it was so; he couldn't express it. Like a subterranean stream his love was coursing through his innermost being, and if it ever rose to the surface it was with such fierce passionate power that it threatened with destruction the very object of its love. The captain raised his head, roused himself, and with the same impetuosity with which he had pressed the child to his breast, he set him down on the floor again. 'Go to bed,' he said.

"The boy stood in the middle of the room as if he could not recover from what had just happened. I arose and went up to him and as I laid my hand upon his head I felt how his whole body was trembling. 'Pleasant dreams, Männchen,' I said, 'now you will come back to us to school again and I will show you beautiful books and pictures.' The child looked at me with wide-open, terrified eyes.

"The captain rang the bell and as the servant stepped over the threshold the little fellow started up and ran toward him—but it was not Gottlieb Bänsch and I will never forget the look with which the child glanced up into the stranger's face; it was extremely pitiful in its helpless distress.

"After he had gone I turned to the captain and said: 'I believe that the child is still weak from his recent illness and that it would be well to spare him any violent emotion.'

"The captain continued for a while to stare at the floor, then he sprang up and thrust the chair back with a jerk. With long strides he paced from one end of the room to the other; up and down, again and again; at last he stood still and I looked at his rolling eyes and saw that only the whites were visible, just as they were on that day when the children were buried.

"He shook his clenched fist toward heaven. 'If He wants to be a hangman,' he cried with a voice trembling with rage and despair, 'why does He do His work in such a bunglesome manner? Why did He leave me one? Why did He not take them all? All together? That would have been better for me! Yes, yes, much better! Then it would have been all over and I could have put an end to my existence and been buried with my children!'

"I was unable to make a reply nor did he seem to expect any. He threw himself again into the chair before the writing-desk, picked up a picture in a brown frame which lay upon the table and held it before him with both his hands. It was the portrait of a boy, the picture of little Edmund. With a fixed look he gazed long at the features of the beloved face, then he placed it back on the table, folded his arms over it, while his head sank down and rested upon his arms so that his lips touched the picture, and I saw how a violent sobbing shook his whole frame. He appeared to me like a tree which had been cut to the heart by the woodman's

ax and the trembling of which foretold the approaching fall.

"A long time passed. Finally I gave a sign of life. He started up and looked about. 'Pardon me,' he said as he arose.

" 'There is nothing here that requires an apology,' I answered, 'but allow me to make a suggestion: Do not forget that the unfortunate child has no one left him in the world but you.'

" 'That is just the trouble,' he replied gloomily; 'here all is gone,' and he beat his breast, 'and he who has nothing can give nothing.'

"With a sigh I shook my head—there was nothing more to be said. I left him and as I stepped out of the house I had a feeling as if death stood in the dark hallway behind me and closed the door of the house like the cover of a coffin.

. . . . .

"Winter came and soon after the beginning of the same Männchen appeared in school again for the first time since his illness. I allowed him to enter his former class. I gave him the same seat that he had used before—the bench was the same, but the boy that sat upon it was no longer the same.

"It had always been hard for him to learn, but he had been light-hearted and faithful, perhaps his older brother had also assisted him and thus he had mastered his lessons. Now it was all different. There was no one

to help him and he himself seemed to be oppressed by some heavy burden which paralyzed his strength and ability.

"I had asked the teachers to show him the utmost consideration and I know for a certainty that he did not hear a harsh word in all that time—who could have had the heart to be unkind to the pale child, who evidently tried so hard but who found his work too difficult! It is possible, indeed, to protect a flower from frost and heat and from all external hardships, but not from the disease which has been drawn up from the roots and which climbs from cell to cell until the whole plant is destroyed. The pain and sorrow from which we tried to shield him had its source within himself; it came from the naturally reserved nature which he had inherited from his father just as he owed his blond hair and light eyes to his mother.

"All this became clear to me only when things had developed to their final conclusion and lay before me like a connected picture; then as I looked back I realized with horror what tortures the unfortunate child must have suffered during those days. All I noticed at the time was that from day to day he became more and more shy, and that he seemed to withdraw deeper and deeper into his own dreams. He never associated with any of his schoolmates, he was afraid of his teachers, and I was the only person in whom he still seemed to have confidence, but gradually this also was withdrawn.

The first few days he approached me when he came to school and gave me his hand: this ceased: then he avoided me and slipped into his class room. I was not destined to meet him any more in the friendly way of former days.

"When I took my afternoon walks I would often see a little form running about alone on the snow-covered meadow below, shoveling up heaps of snow—that was he, playing about like a little child of nature. Once, as I was walking along the dike, I noticed how he concealed himself behind a tree and watched me from a distance. I called to him and he came out from his hiding place; it seemed as if he were going to come toward me, then he suddenly turned around and ran down the dike far away from me, as if he were being driven by an unspeakable fear.

. . . . .

"Thus the winter passed and Easter came, a time to which many a pupil looks forward with anxious heart because the question of promotion or non-promotion is then decided. It was impossible to pass the boy, and although it made me feel as if some deep injury were being inflicted upon me personally, yet I was forced to withhold promotion from him. I went to the class-room myself and informed him and his fellow-pupils as kindly as possible, throwing all the blame on his illness and giving him comfort and hope for the future.

The boy sat motionless in his seat and did not look up at me.

"Afterwards, when the scholars were passing out, I saw him stealing away with bowed head in the midst of the others. I stopped him and asked him to give me his hand; he did so without raising his head. 'Just look at me, please,' I said. He obeyed and I looked into a face full of hopeless sadness. It was more than sadness; it was that heartrending expression which one sees in the eyes of sick children who suddenly look like grown-up people, as though they had a presentiment that they stood close before the solution of the enigma of existence and non-existence and would soon know far more than all the grown-up people from whom they had hitherto learned.

"'Are you ill, Männchen?' I asked. He silently shook his head.

"'Do you know that I mean it kindly with you?' I asked. He nodded his head slowly but it did not look as though he meant to say 'Yes,' but rather 'Never mind, I know well enough how it stands'

"It was impossible to get him to talk.

"On the morning of that very day Spring had won the victory over Winter. The ice on the stream had broken and the floods of water, rising higher from hour to hour, came rushing along. A howling wind which had risen about noon accompanied the roaring of the waves, so that it seemed as if these two demons of

nature had conspired to make a fearful day for the frightened people. Indeed, I cannot remember that I have ever seen a day before or since like that one. It hardly was light at all. The sun seemed to be stifled by the dark gray clouds which poured out of the south-west part of the sky as from some inexhaustible source and, hanging far down close to the stream, chased along in mad haste; the seething gray water below, which rapidly climbed higher up the dike, dashed its cakes of ice ever harder and louder against the wooden bridge as if it were now bound to destroy this barrier in its course; and then the gray sky above—all this made a picture of indescribably fearful desolation.

"Add to this the strange tones caused by the storm as it dashed against a thousand corners and angles, drowning the sound of every human voice and deceiving and mocking the ears of men. To this very day I feel the icy shudder which came over me as I was crossing the trembling, tottering bridge on my return to the city and I stopped involuntarily because I thought I heard the shrill cry of a child's voice. I soon realized that I had been deceived, that it was only the wind which rattled in the rigging of the ships lying at the foot of the bridge and which was cut through by the tightly drawn ropes as by whistling saws. Once more the sound was repeated and once more fright bound me to the spot where I stood, for again I thought I had heard a distant mournful cry; it was a delusion this time also, but high

above my head I saw a crow which tried in vain to fight against the wind but was finally hurled around like a piece of black paper and thrown backward—from the crow had come the hoarse mournful cry which I had heard.

"In spite of this explanation, however, the dull, uncanny feeling never left me, an oppression of mental anguish which I tried in vain to master, although I could not quite understand what it was that made me shudder.

"This feeling grew upon me as the darkness increased. I could endure it no longer within my four walls, for I was oppressed by a presentiment of some great calamity which was to come upon us in this awful night. I went once more to the bridge; I wanted to go once more to the dike, although I could not explain to myself why, but they would not let me cross over, for the bridge threatened every moment to go down with the waves. I remained a while with the men who were guarding the bridge and watched them as they examined, by the dark red light of their torches, the rising of the water on the piers of the bridge.

"'What is that swimming there?' cried one of the men suddenly as he threw the light of his torch as low as possible down over the stream, and when I heard this I rushed to the railing and I believe I uttered a cry.

"It was again an unnecessary fright, for what came rushing along was nothing more than a young birch

tree which the stream had somewhere torn out of the ground and carried along in its course. It was strange indeed to see how the branches of the young tree-top rose from the water so that from a distance they looked almost like outstretched arms imploring help. Ashamed of my weakness before the people, although they had no doubt been entirely too excited to pay any attention to it, I now went home.

"The night passed without any disaster occurring; the water began to fall as rapidly as it had risen, and when morning dawned the danger was passed. During the forenoon, for you will remember it was now vacation time, I started out to see how my old dike had withstood the high water. When I had gone only a short distance I saw, about two hundred paces beyond me, a group of people standing at the edge of the dike and looking down at something which seemed to be in the stream below. At this place there was a thicket of alders and willows. 'The dike has probably sprung a leak,' I said to a workman who came towards me from the place.

" 'No,' he said, 'it is a child.'

" 'A child!' I exclaimed, but he had already passed on.

"My heart suddenly seemed to stand still and the dike under my feet seemed to begin to rock. I do not know whether I ran or walked; I only know that I approached the people who crowded together that I might look down and then, without a word, I was forced to sit down on

the edge of the dike, for it suddenly grew dark before my eyes.

"'It is the captain's child," I heard the people whispering to each other—yes, it was the captain's child—the last one.

"Below in the thicket, wedged in between two willows, his head just visible but the rest of his body still covered with water, lay Männchen—and he was dead.

"No one knows or ever will know how he came to be there; it may have been a mis-step that hurled him below, for no one saw it. But often during sleepless nights I hear him crying again and see him nod his little head with the sad expression: 'I know well enough how it stands'—and then there rises within me a terrible whispering voice which tries to persuade me that it was no mis-step; that it was something else which caused him to take refuge down there, away from this earth where no one cared for him any more, this child whose only fault was that he alone was left of all his brothers.

"When we had released from the thicket the limbs of the boy, made clammy and rigid by the coldness of the water and of death, and had carried him up the dike, I saw a man running hastily toward us through the gardens behind the houses which lay in the lowlands along the dike. It was the captain. His head was bare and the wind blew through his black hair. He wore no sword—only an overcoat, and this was but only half fastened. He came straight toward us, straight through

the gardens of the houses which lay between his home and the dike. He jumped over the fences which separated the gardens; over the beds and plants he flew, and as he reached the lattice gate of the last garden, which was too high to leap over and which did not yield at once to pressure, he threw himself against it with such force that it broke.

"As he came up the dike I heard his voice: 'Where? Where? Where?' he cried.

"The next moment he had torn the body of the boy out of my arms and pressed it violently to his breast and passionately kissed the pale, silent face of his dead child. The boy's head lay against his heart, the wet blond hair hung down heavily, and before my soul rose the picture of the child as I saw it lying in its father's arms when it was still alive and yet looked as though it were already dead.

"The men stood silent, gathered together in one shy group and offered the tribute of silent reverence to the colossal human woe which was unfolded before their eyes.

"The captain did not even glance at us, he seemed hardly to know that we were there; with a desolate look he gazed beyond his child, up into the gray heavens, where the clouds were moving along in ragged masses. Then he tore open his overcoat and drew the cold form of the boy as far as possible within it, as if to warm the

dead limbs against his own warm body, and thus he started with him on the road.

"No one ventured to help him, no one dared to interfere. We let him have his way, for we felt our utter helplessness in the presence of such deep despair.

"I looked after him as he hurried along with his load, blind to the curious crowd which had meanwhile assembled, deaf to the murmuring and whispering about him, and as I saw him staggering along the thought came to me that he had now reached the place which he had longed for when he lamented that he could not put an end to his existence and be buried with his children. I had now become so accustomed to and prepared for the gruesome that I should not have been surprised if they had brought me the news that he had followed his boys. It is possible that his superior officers had similar fears for him, for soon after this he received a commission which demanded his whole strength and took him away from our city for several months. When he returned from this commission the mobilization of the army had just been ordered; the war with France was impending.

"Now there would be guns and cannon to perform for him the friendly service which he so much desired. The reserves were called in and among them appeared a well-known face—that of Gottlieb Bänsch. He was assigned to the black captain's battery and went with it to the field of battle. A few weeks later he returned to our city with a bullet wound in his leg which he had

received on the Hills of Spichern and which put an abrupt end to his military career. At my request he was brought to my home. I cared for him myself and I can say without boasting that I cared for him well.

"On the list of the dead which reached us after that bloody day like a mournful echo of the glorious battle, the black captain's name stood as the first of the fallen. His battery had been one of those which had made the impossible possible, which had climbed the hills of Spichern and had turned the tide of battle to victory.

"'We had no idea that we could do it,' Gottlieb Bänsch told me; 'but the captain was always in the lead and kept calling, "Courage boys, we'll win."'

"Just at the moment when he had given the order to unlimber the guns, three bullets pierced his breast. Gottlieb Bänsch wanted to carry him out of the thickest of the fight, but he said: 'Never mind, Gottlieb, it is not necessary,' and Gottlieb told us that he had never before seen such a look of contentment on the captain's face. 'Then as he grew weaker,' Gottlieb continued, 'he took my hand and said: "Gottlieb, I thank you for all your kindness to my children, and when you get back home, go out where they are lying and look after their graves."' Gottlieb Bänsch paused, 'and then it was all over,' he said.

"As soon as he had recovered sufficiently to limp along, leaning on my arm, Gottlieb's first walk was out to the place under the lilac bush where once three had

lain and where now four were lying. When we returned we found a summons for Gottlieb Bänsch to appear the next morning before the court. The black captain had left a will there which had been opened. Gottlieb Bänsch evidently had something to do with it, but what it was we did not know.

"On the following morning we were to learn this. The will in which the black captain had given the last directions concerning his small estate contained these words: 'To my former attendant, the gunner Gottlieb Bänsch, I bequeath one thousand dollars as a token of my gratitude for all his kindness to my children. My wish for him is that he may some time have children of his own and that God will reward and bless him in them, and I hope that he will sometimes think of his old captain and his captain's children.'

"When the soldier heard this he covered his eyes with his broad hand and I saw the tears roll down between his fingers.

"It was a long time before he could compose himself, and as he arose he leaned heavily on my arm. When we were outside again he took his cotton handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his eyes. 'Yes,' he said, 'he couldn't show it very well, but I always knew that he was a good man and loved his children.' "

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